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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT Thursday, August 4, 1938.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "WOOD FLOORS." Information from the Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Publication available, Circular 489, Wood Floors for Dwellings: Their Selection, Installation, Finish and Maintenance.

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We're going on an imaginary inspection trip today, to look at some of the new houses being shown over in the Country Club section. I'm particularly interested in the floors because I've been reading a new bulletin on the subject of wood floors, prepared by the U. S. Forest Service.

You've heard of the Forest Products Laboratory, I'm sure, at Madison, Wisconsin. It's a field office of the Forest Service down at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C. That's where the experts on woods carry on their tests and experiments. The bulletin, Circular 489, is written by a group of these experts. It tells everything a person wants to know about wood floors for dwellings- what woods to select for different parts of the house, how a floor should be laid to give best service and remain tight and level, different ways of finishing it, and how to keep it looking nice.

Maybe you think that only the last of these subjects concerns us homemakers, and that we can let George- or Harry or Dick- attend to getting the floor in place. Personally I've enough feminine curiosity to look into the whole thing for myself.

So let's go. We must pretend we're in one of these new developments with a real estate man showing us round and telling us things. Here's the first house, a "model home", all dressed up for visitors by one of the best department stores in town. Colonial period furniture downstairs and a nice maple set in the master bed-room. But it's the floors we're interested in, Mr. Salesman. What kind of wood in this living-room floor? Hardwood? Yes, but what kind of hardwood? Oak, maple, beech or birch- those are the common kinds, I'm told. So it's oak, is it? Well, which kind of oak- red oak, or white oak?

What's that? There are some 20 species of oak in this country that are often used for lumber, you say, and it's hard to tell them apart. Perhaps we'd better let that point pass. If it's oak, it will be a satisfactory floor. The hardwoods really are harder; they wear more uniformly, they're less liable to sliver, they take a better finish, and they are more attractive in appearance. I learned that in my bulletin on floors.

This living-room floor certainly checks on all those points, doesn't it? Of course we're not surprised that it is one of the features which has added to expense in building this house. (Remind me to speak to the agent later about that bulge along the baseboard.)

I like the wax finish over clear shellac, not too slippery, and retaining the beautiful natural color of the wood. Isn't it shellacked? You say they

have used one of the very new floor seals? Please explain.

(The salesman is now talking.) He says, in substance:

"There is a growing trend back to the old oil finish for floors, except that in place of linseed oil, specially designed products known as 'floor seals' are being used. It requires less labor to apply them than to put on linseed oil in the old way and rub it in by hand. Floor seals may be regarded as thin varnishes made to penetrate less deeply into the wood than the unbodied drying oils. They are relatively new products on the market. It's very important, by the way, that people using seals for the first time learn exactly how these products should be used."

Now let's look at the bed-room floors. Frequently, I'm told, builders use hardwood on the first floor and softwood on the bed-room floors, to reduce cost. Here in the master bed-room they've used maple flooring, to harmonize with the maple furniture. I like that. Yellow pine- as I expected,- is used for the attic floor. That's all right- it won't get too much wear up there- and it's all right to use a somewhat lower grade of wood, with more knots and somewhat uneven color. We won't object to that.

Suppose we go into one of the unfinished houses. Maybe we can see how these floors are put together, because that's very important. The modern way of laying floors so they will remain rigid and level and will not warp with dampness nor develop cracks or humps is really to lay two floors. The first one, or subfloor, is of less expensive and lower-grade wood, because nobody ever sees it. It serves as a temporary floor for the carpenters and other workmen while the building is going up. The bulletin also says:

"The subfloor adds much to the warmth of the house and strengthens and stiffens the finish floor. It greatly reduces nail movement, thereby minimizing the tendency toward squeaking." Well, I'm glad to learn what makes floors squeak, aren't you?

The subfloor is laid diagonally across the joists, and on the four outer edges there is a little space left for possible expansion. Otherwise it might buckle up in the middle. The finish floor is not put on until all the other work in the building is finished- plastering, papering, or any other work that would cause people to walk about on it.

The finish floor doesn't go right on top of the subfloor. There's building paper or building felt, between, to take up any unevenness, deaden sounds, and help insulate the floor. The finish floor is laid with the boards running parallel with the walls of the room, in the same direction throughout the house- usually that of the longest dimension of the building.

Here's a partly completed house where you can imagine you are seeing what I mean. The subfloor has been swept thoroughly, but no water has been used to clean it, for that might make the flooring warp and make the top floor uneven. Over in this next room the building paper is being put on- you can see how it is overlapped about four inches, to make a good smooth padding. And here's just what I wanted to see- how the quarter-round molding at the base-board is put on. That's wrong- nailing it to the flooring like that- it should have been nailed diagonally through to the subfloor with long nails. That poor method of nailing it explains the bulge we noticed in the livingroom.

I'm afraid this will have to be continued in another talk, for time's up. Any of you who are building or buying houses maysend to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for a copy of Circular 489. It is free while the supply lasts. Later on I'll talk about floor finishes, and floor care.